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Implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled "The future we want", world leaders commited to strengthening the Economic and Social Council and recognized its key role in achieving a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. In its resolution 2012/30, the Council referred to that commitment and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report containing proposals for strengthening the Council, including its working methods, and giving special attention to the integrated and coordinated implementation of, and follow-up to, the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields. The present report includes specific recommendations aimed at transforming the Council into an issues-oriented, knowledge-based, stakeholder-friendly intergovernmental body. It also addresses the need to bring greater coherence to the work of the Council system by, inter alia, refocusing its agenda; streamlining its work programme; and restructuring the calendar of its sessions.

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I. Background

1. In the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), entitled "The future we want", world leaders envisioned an enhanced multilateral system to better address the global challenges of sustainable development. Their commitment to strengthen the Economic and Social Council was recalled by the Council in its resolution 2012/30, which requested the Secretary-General to submit, within the framework of the review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16, a report containing proposals for strengthening the Council and its working methods, giving special attention to the integrated and coordinated implementation of, and follow-up to, the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields.

2. In the immediate follow-up to the Rio+20 Conference, at the Special Ministerial Meeting of the Council, held in September 2012, Member States expressed support for a major system-wide reconsideration or "rethink" of the agenda-setting, working methods and multi-stakeholder engagement of the Council. At its sixty-seventh session, the General Assembly also reaffirmed the role of the Council in its resolution 67/203. These mandates are the focus of the present report. At the same time, in the review of Assembly resolution 61/16, the Council needs to ensure its relevance in respect of contemporary challenges, in line with Article 63 of the Charter of the United Nations. The report does not address the larger issue of global economic governance, which is being considered in the General Assembly (see resolution 66/256). It generally addresses the broad issues under the purview of the Assembly, not the specific steps that are under the purview of the Council.

3. The report benefited from inputs received from Member States, functional and regional commissions, and other subsidiary bodies of the Council. Inputs were also received from United Nations system organizations and an independent consultant.[1] The report suggests ways in which the Council can leverage its assets within the United Nations system and with external actors in order to fully play to its expected role in the wake of the Rio+20 outcome and the upcoming post-2015 development agenda.

II. Introduction

4. Improving the quality of life of a growing population in a sustainable manner remains the most urgent development priority for the international community. However, pursuing poverty eradication and sustainable development together is a formidable challenge both for national Governments and for the multilateral system. No single sector or nation can tackle it alone, and policy coordination at all levels has become even more essential. The expected emphasis of the post-2015 agenda on sustainable development, which will be universally applied, will have a significant bearing on how the global partnership for development should be reoriented. Ensuring that an agreed post-2015 agenda is followed by effective action will require international institutions to adapt to the increasingly global, multidimensional and interconnected nature of development challenges.

[1] The inputs are available from www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/strengtheningofecosoc.shtml.

5. The Economic and Social Council has not quite fulfilled the role set for it by the Charter of the United Nations. This is reflective of longer-term trends, the increased complexity of issues, the growth of multilateral arrangements and the change in the economic landscape. The Council's core purpose remains valid but its impact, relevance and visibility have been questioned. This must be acknowledged at the outset if the current exercise to strengthen the Council is to succeed when past efforts have not.

6. Strengthening the Council will require significant transformation and an overhaul of its methods of work. Remedial actions should build upon the Council's latent comparative advantages. Its subsidiary and expert bodies constitute a vast reservoir of knowledge on economic, social and environmental matters that, if appropriately tapped, can transform the Council into a global "thought leader". In addition, the Council's legitimacy and convening power can attract key stakeholders from government, the private sector and civil society; this would enrich its deliberations and engage the stakeholders in meaningful follow-up in their respective spheres of activity. The Council would need to take up development crises and emergencies as they occur so that its deliberations are seen as contributing to the shaping of an effective and timely global response. In so doing, the Council would exercise leadership in its unique role of coordinating the operational activities of the United Nations system. Strengthening the Council in this manner can be initiated with structural measures as detailed below; however, the transformation will take time to bring about and will require political will.

III. A strengthened Economic and Social Council

7. The world is changing rapidly and is confronted by economic, social and environmental challenges that cannot be addressed effectively without enhanced international cooperation. As recognized by world leaders at the Rio+20 Conference, there is a need for effective multilateralism and efficient intergovernmental arrangements, including a strengthened Economic and Social Council.

A. Building on the comparative advantages of the Council

8. The Council has shown its adaptability through several realignments of its functioning and working methods. The earliest changes focused on expanding membership. After 1973, initiatives were developed to increase the Council's impact; several proposals were put forward from the 1970s through the 1990s, although many were not implemented.[2] Since 1990, the Council has assumed the task of ensuring the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major conferences and summits. Major milestones include the 2002 Monterrey Consensus, which established the Council's role in financing for development, and the 2005 World Summit outcome, which reaffirmed the Council's role as the principal body for the review of implementation of the international development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Most recently, in the Rio+20

[2] For a discussion and analysis of these initiatives, see Gert Rosenthal, "The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations: An Issues Paper", Dialogue on Globalization: Occasional Papers, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New York February 2005.

outcome document, "The future we want", world leaders recognized the Council's key role in achieving a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

9. The Council has several comparative advantages:

(a) It has political legitimacy, both as a United Nations Charter body and as an inclusive multilateral development forum;

(b) It has significant convening power, enabling it to attract a broad range of stakeholders, from ministers, parliamentarians and development partners, to businesses, foundations, academics and non-governmental organizations;

(c) With its subsidiary and expert bodies, the Council system, has accumulated substantive expertise in economic, social and environmental matters;

(d) The Council's annual ministerial review and Development Cooperation Forum have further enhanced its role as a multi-stakeholder forum for sharing best practices and lessons learned, and mutual accountability;

(e) The Council has shown its ability to promote consensus on global development priorities, from information and communications technologies to employment, global public health and education.

10. Notwithstanding these advantages, the Council is seen as having low visibility and impact and has been criticized for being weak on agenda-setting. It is viewed by some as lacking in relevance and impact on real issues, and its working methods are subject to fragmentation and a lack of coherence. At times, its best work has not been fully recognized, owing to its limited visibility and profile among Member States and the global public. Many functions of the Council have too often been performed in isolation and not guided by a common vision or strategy. The Council has also been seen as being overly process-driven, without being sufficiently focused on issues or results.

B. Agenda-setting: promoting an issues-based approach

11. A first step towards strengthening the Council would involve simplification and rationalization of the Council's agenda. This is a matter of good housekeeping. Given the breadth and complexity of global challenges, and the number of existing commitments whose implementation needs to be reviewed, the Council should set clearer priorities and bring the full breadth and strength of the United Nations system to bear on selected global, multidimensional and interconnected development challenges. It should employ more effectively its ability to make strategic use of the United Nations entities and specialized agencies and fulfil its mandate to increase system-wide coherence and coordination. An issues-oriented agenda would allow for more focused consideration of complex matters and would simplify the task of promoting coherence in the work of the system. Accordingly, the Council may consider shifting to a more issues-based approach, which would involve taking up, at each session, a main theme to be addressed by all relevant parts of the entire United Nations system, according to their areas of specialization.[3]

[3] Some commissions have already responded to this call by contributing to the theme of the annual ministerial review but it needs to be made more systematic.

12. The annual theme format has worked well in the context of the annual ministerial review and could be extended to the full Council agenda, which would bring perspectives from all three dimensions of sustainable development to the discussion. The Council would need to decide the theme in advance, such as through a two-year programme of work. This would be vital for engaging stakeholders within and beyond the United Nations system. While the themes would be selected in advance, there should be sufficient flexibility to take up additional themes under emerging challenges, which could replace the thematic debate. This would allow the Council to address emerging issues as and when needed.

13. The subsidiary bodies would provide inputs on the annual theme around the three dimensions and such cross-cutting issues as gender, financing, science and technology. Each subsidiary body could focus on one or more dimensions, but their inputs should be targeted, with clear recommendations and technical guidance on how the Council should integrate the inputs, with others, into the broader picture of sustainable development.

14. An issues-based approach would promote greater thematic coherence in the work of the Council and its functional and regional commissions and other subsidiary bodies. It would strengthen the links between the Council and its subsidiary bodies and add value to policymaking.

C. Bridging the knowledge gap: using the Council for "thought leadership"

15. A greater focus on issues would allow the Council to expand its role as a "thought leader", leveraging its accumulated knowledge and expertise to guide programme orientation and policy direction.

16. A large volume of knowledge products and knowledge resources are generated annually by the United Nations. The Council accounts for a significant proportion of that knowledge output, directly or indirectly, by virtue of its oversight responsibility for much of the United Nations system. This knowledge should be shared across the United Nations system in a more integrated way, allowing the Council to identify areas for further work, develop new analysis and perspectives, and feed these into policy debate at the highest levels.

17. The Council needs to actively invest in knowledge to be relevant and effective in today's rapidly changing world, where nearly all countries are undergoing significant social and economic change. The Council has the potential to bring together its subsidiary and expert bodies, along with specialized agencies, to conduct integrated analysis of emerging global development challenges, considering economic, social and environmental dimensions and creating a shared understanding across entities with different mandates and areas of expertise. This will enable the Council to provide a developmental perspective to crises and emergencies.

18. Investment in knowledge is also important for the Council to exercise authoritative monitoring of the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields.

19. With a view to strengthening its capacity for "thought leadership", the Council may consider developing a knowledge-sharing system to support and enhance its

work. The aims of such an approach would be to: (a) enhance the inter-organizational management of knowledge produced by its subsidiary bodies, functional commissions, funds, programmes and agencies; (b) better channel available knowledge to Governments in addressing specific issues and concerns; (c) ensure that decisions within the Council are taken on the basis of sound evidence; and (d) bolster coherence of actions by the Council and its subsidiary bodies.

20. Several reports issued by United Nations system organizations highlighted the need to promote knowledge-sharing within United Nations organizations and the United Nations system as a whole. Since knowledge management has been implemented in many specialized agencies, funds and programmes and in the Council's subsidiary bodies, the Council is well-positioned to tap existing system-wide knowledge on key aspects of the sustainable development agenda for its thought leadership.

21. To fully benefit from this potential, the Council could elaborate a knowledge-sharing strategy. This would comprise: (a) an interactive knowledge network with a focus on the management of both explicit and tacit knowledge; (b) communities of practice set up across the Council entities; (c) mapping of products and skills available through the Council system secretariats.

22. In the outcome document, "The future we want", world leaders recognized that inter- and intra-disciplinary sharing of knowledge is essential to create the individual and organizational knowledge necessary for achieving an integrated approach to sustainable development. A holistic knowledge-leveraging strategy for the Council system should meet this mandate. Further research and a feasibility study would need to be undertaken to explore the costs and benefits of the undertaking and its possible spillover effects.

23. In order to play its role as a thought leader most effectively, the Council should be able to draw on the best available knowledge and expertise, both within and outside the United Nations system. The Committee for Development Policy, and other bodies could be strengthened as platforms for the Council to connect with academia, experts and scientists. The Council could also consider appointing time-bound advisory groups of scientists and experts on topical themes. In this way, the Committee for Development Policy and advisory groups could act as a think tank for the Council, serve as an incubator of ideas for areas of future thematic focus for the main themes each year, and enable the Council to better address the science-policy interface.

D. The Council: monitoring and mutual accountability

24. The 2005 World Summit made the Council a platform for review of the implementation of the United Nations development agenda through the annual ministerial reviews and the Development Cooperation Forum.

25. With its focus on an annual theme and the connection between national and global reviews, the annual ministerial review has been a useful tool to monitor progress towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and to share lessons learned and best practices. A strengthened ministerial review could become a central venue for

monitoring the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, supported by the entire Council system (see sect. V below).

26. During its first five years, the Development Cooperation Forum built its reputation as an effective and inclusive multi-stakeholder forum that can influence global development cooperation discussions. It also emerged as a mutual accountability platform. The Development Cooperation Forum could further expand its role as a driver for greater national and global accountability in development cooperation by promoting mutual accountability as an overarching principle in the post-2015 development agenda, with a view to promoting enhanced reporting on agreed commitments and adapting development cooperation to emerging challenges.

E. A responsive Council

27. The changing global context has brought with it the need for swift and intensified coordination of actions, particularly in a time of crisis. In addition to considering an issues-based approach and using the Council as a knowledge and accountability platform, Member States may wish to consider how the Council can be enabled to respond promptly to crises and emergencies that affect the realization of development goals and the well-being of people.

28. The Council should consider convening on an ad hoc basis to address global development emergencies, raise awareness and serve as a high-level policy platform for coordination of actors working on specific emergency situations. This mandate, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/16, should be used more effectively. The timelines and flexibility required to respond in such situations would mean that the Council should convene special sessions within days of a major crisis, drawing attention to the particular situation and rallying stakeholders for action. The Council has periodically convened such meetings, including on the avian flu in 2005 and the global food crisis in 2008. Nevertheless, to date, lack of sufficient analytical capacity to provide substantive input and recommendations to the Council at short notice, and lack of secretariat support, including conference services, have prevented this mandate from being fully implemented. However, more effective knowledge management and strengthened institutional mechanisms will enable the Council to be more responsive in the future.

29. In addition to reacting to the consequences of emergencies and crises, the Council should focus on forward-looking discussions, especially in respect of problems that are more structural in nature.

F. Engaging multiple stakeholders

30. In the current globalized and interconnected international context, broader and deeper engagement with a wider range of actors from academia, civil society, parliamentarians, local authorities, the private sector and social groups, is desirable. This would mobilize support on specific issues and promote better policymaking and targeting and delivery of services. Partnerships are increasingly recognized as important in leveraging knowledge and funding in most development sectors.

31. Multi-stakeholder engagement can make an important contribution to the new focus on issues, while also increasing the Council's thought leadership. The Council

should serve as a platform for high-level engagement among Member States, the private sector, foundations and non-governmental organizations to enlist greater involvement and accelerate progress towards implementation of the United Nations development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals.

32. Since 2008, the Council has held a special annual event on partnerships as part of its preparations for the annual ministerial review, to broaden its range of stakeholders and promote concrete initiatives. A wide range of partnership initiatives were developed in support of the Millennium Development Goals and of sustainable development as part of the Rio+20 Conference. The Partnerships Forum could be upgraded, becoming a space for in-depth discussion on the future role of partnerships, for the development of new partnerships in priority policy areas and for the mobilization of action at the operational level.

33. While all stakeholders have an important role in the delivery of the United Nations development agenda, it is especially important to increase the active engagement of young people since they hold the key to the realization of the mandate set out in the outcome document, "The future we want". The Council could consider exploring mechanisms for deepening its dialogue with young people. This would extend the dialogue established within the new youth forum towards a more inclusive process that will allow young people to influence policy development and decision-making.[4] More direct engagement with young people at the intergovernmental level would align with the priority established by the Secretary-General, to further strengthen the Organization's focus on young people. Enhancing the Council's use of social media will greatly facilitate its outreach with young people.

G. Improving the public profile of the Council

34. The task of communicating the role, views and achievements of the Council to the public in a compelling manner, within a maze of information overload, is a difficult challenge and involves a crowded field of development actors. By strengthening itself, the Council will "earn" the attention of the media; in other words, the media attention will be a residual windfall.

35. Ideally, the public profile of the Council will evolve to that of a preferred platform for debate and dialogue as it begins to respond more quickly as an intellectual leader on a range of cutting-edge and emerging issues and becomes a place where innovative ideas and solutions to sustainable development challenges are previewed and disseminated. To ease this makeover, the use of innovative formats for facilitating discussions around the Council's work, which has proved effective, should be expanded. Greater visibility for the President of the Council (see below), more effective dissemination of knowledge and an enhanced role during crises and emergencies will all build the profile of the Council and the broader United Nations, both among the general public and opinion-formers.

36. The Council's institutional architecture represents an enormous, if largely untapped, communications asset. This includes the regional commissions and various field entities, all of which could do more to help the Council to promote

[4] The Council held its first youth forum (half-day event) on 4 May 2012; the second (full-day event) in the series is planned for 27 March 2013.

monitoring and national implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations conferences. The Bureau of the Council may consider utilizing innovative modes of communications with the public at large, such as web-based platforms and social media, with user-generated content and direct engagement and feedback. While the Council has been a leader in the use of social media compared to the other Charter bodies, it needs to integrate such use routinely in its work. Reaching the more than 10 million followers of the United Nations through regular social media campaigns offers untold potential to engage, inspire and mobilize.

IV. Strengthening the relations of the Council with other relevant bodies

37. Over the years, the work of the Council has necessarily expanded in many areas in response to emerging issues and global crises and increasingly complex and entrenched development problems affecting particular countries and vulnerable groups. The Council today is really a Council system, comprising subsidiary bodies of functional and regional commissions, interaction with United Nations entities and specialized agencies and interface with other Charter organs, particularly the General Assembly and Security Council and their subsidiary bodies. Managing these relationships can be time-consuming, cumbersome and procedural. Harnessing the collective strengths of the Council system and the potential synergy requires effective relations between the Council and the other intergovernmental bodies and related organizations of this extended family.

A. Streamlining the relations of the Council with other intergovernmental bodies

General Assembly

38. The United Nations intergovernmental process on economic and social issues is marked by the dual competence, originated in the Charter, of the General Assembly, particularly its Second and Third Committees, and the Economic and Social Council. By creating functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies, the Council has increased its involvement in specific areas of work while the same or related topics remain on the agenda of the General Assembly.

39. Discussions at the Council and its functional commissions are often more inclusive of multi-stakeholders, owing to the significant involvement of a wide range of experts and civil society representatives during segments of the Council and sessions of the commissions. On the other hand, the respective negotiation processes for resolutions in both bodies are similar. As a result, the Second or Third Committees of the General Assembly and a Council functional commission or the Council itself have adopted similar texts within short intervals. In addition, little attention appears to be given to the programmes of work of other bodies when selecting themes for future sessions of a given commission or Committee. Similarly, the Assembly usually maintains its periodicity of resolutions on specific topics independently from the timing of the consideration of the same topics by Council bodies. This state of affairs has led to overlap and repetition in the United Nations intergovernmental process.

40. Both the General Assembly and the Council are enabled by the Charter and by their internal rules of procedures to adopt resolutions on issues on their agenda. However, with a view to ensuring coherence and complementarity in their respective activities, both bodies could consider adopting guiding principles and specific modalities of work. This is not a simple, mechanical task since political considerations often govern the consideration of particular issues in specific bodies. Nevertheless, a degree of rationalization would contribute to the strengthening of the Council.

41. The Presidents of the General Assembly and the Council could spearhead the convening of an annual meeting of the Bureaux of the Second and Third Committees of the Assembly with the Bureaux of the Council and relevant functional commissions, with a view to promoting coherence and synergies in the work of those bodies. The definition of a main theme for the Council each year, as proposed earlier in the present report, should facilitate the process. During the annual meeting, a session could be devoted to knowledge-sharing among the Committees and expert bodies.

Security Council

42. Effective collaboration between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council is important. Conflict and violence are serious impediments to development. At least one fifth of humanity lives in countries experiencing significant violence, political conflict, insecurity and societal fragility.[5] No country affected by violence or fragility has achieved a single Millennium Development Goal target.[6] Areas of collaboration between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council include the relationship between conflict prevention and development, and the continuum from post-conflict relief to development. The importance of interactions in this area is likely to continue to grow, given the need to tackle poverty and hunger in conflict-affected or conflict-prone countries.

43. There are also other global issues that require joint work by both Councils. For example, the President of the Security Council participated in the special event on the global food crisis hosted by the Economic and Social Council in 2008. The President of the Economic and Social Council contributed to debates of the Security Council twice in 2007; earlier efforts include collaboration that led to the creation by the Economic and Social Council of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti in 1998, which was the forerunner of and model for the ad hoc advisory groups on African countries emerging from conflict established in 2002.[7] There is a heightened awareness of the two-way relationship between sustainable development on the one hand, and peace and security on the other, making it essential that the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council work together effectively pursuant to Article 65 of the Charter.

44. In the future, opportunities could be explored for making the interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council more structured and better defined rather than based on ad hoc arrangements.

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[5] See *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011: Lethal Encounters*, Geneva Declaration Secretariat, (Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 2011).

[6] World Bank, *World Development Report 2011* (Washington, D.C.).

[7] The ad hoc advisory groups on African countries emerging from conflict were created in response to a request from the General Assembly in its resolution 55/217.

Peacebuilding Commission

45. Many Member States support a strong link between the Economic and Social Council and the Peacebuilding Commission in recognition of the role played by the Council in filling the Organization's institutional gap on peacebuilding with the creation of the Council's Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on Guinea-Bissau (2002-2006) and Burundi (2003-2008). These two Groups were established to promote coherent support to those countries in their respective post-conflict contexts. The Council and the Peacebuilding Commission can and should play complementary roles in post-conflict response.

46. The focus of the Commission is on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict, with particular attention to security sector reform, rule of law, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, mediation support, electoral assistance and basic peace dividends in the form of basic social services and livelihoods support. The Council, on the other hand, has a broad remit on long-term sustainable development and the review of United Nations operational activities system wide.

47. Several attempts have been made since 2006 to define the scope and content of the interaction between the Council and the Commission and to strengthen their institutional linkages. Thus far, the relationship remains informal with a general practice, since 2009, of holding an annual joint meeting of the Bureau of the Council and the Chairs Group of the Commission, an informal briefing by the Chair of the Commission on its work during the substantive session of the Council, and an annual special joint event on issues of common concern such as the impact of the food and economic crises on countries emerging from conflict, on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in countries emerging from conflict and on the Sudan and South Sudan. However, the Council and the Commission could consider deepening their cooperation by elaborating a joint programme of work on issues of common concern, especially with regard to long-term development aspects of countries under consideration by the Commission.

High-level political forum

48. Institutional coherence depends to a large degree on the quality of interaction among intergovernmental bodies. The activities of the high-level political forum established by the outcome of the Rio+20 Conference should complement the Council's work, and the forum should benefit from the strengths of the Council system as decided in paragraph 84, which states that the forum should avoid overlap with existing structures, bodies and entities in a cost-effective manner. There should be coherence between the themes addressed by the Council and those addressed by the forum.

49. Given the different views submitted by Member States for the preparation of the present report, the relations between the forum and the Council can be considered in detail only once an intergovernmental agreement is reached on the forum itself. Nonetheless, it is important for the two bodies to have a close relationship with each other to maximize the potential of each. This is an historic opportunity for designing the intergovernmental bodies to govern as one, in order to ensure that sustainable development challenges are effectively addressed.

B. Regional commissions, specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions

Regional commissions

50. Since the 2005 World Summit, collaboration between the Council and the regional commissions has increased significantly. In particular, almost all regional preparatory meetings for the annual ministerial reviews are organized in collaboration with the regional commissions, which has helped to bring regional perspectives to the reviews. Links have been established between the annual ministerial review and the regional coordination mechanisms. Regional commissions are also collaborating on strengthening regional knowledge networks to promote the effective implementation of the United Nations development agenda and to assess progress. In some instances, the commissions have also assisted countries in the preparation of their national voluntary presentations.

51. While this engagement has expanded the scope of cooperation between the Council and the regional commissions, the recent mandate agreed at the Rio+20 Conference on integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development will require even more intensive and broader collaboration. The regional commissions could bring regional perspectives to the Council. They could also contribute to strengthening the monitoring and implementation functions of the Council with respect to follow-up of the outcomes of United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields. A strengthening of information and communication flows between the Council and the regional commissions would extend the reach of their respective work and enhance their collective impact.

Specialized agencies

52. Since the 2005 World Summit Outcome, engagement by the specialized agencies in the work of the Council has intensified, particularly with respect to the annual ministerial review. At the substantive level, the specialized agencies have increasingly contributed to the preparation of reports of the Secretary-General on the theme of the annual ministerial review and have participated extensively in the review process.

53. This increased engagement is a welcome trend that needs to be continued and further reinforced in order for the Council to take full advantage of each individual organization's expertise and strength. There is also a need for an increase in the flow of information from the specialized agencies to the Council. This could be pursued through regular exchanges between the heads of their governing bodies and the President of the Council, pursuant to Articles 63 and 64 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Bretton Woods institutions

54. The Council has pursued closer collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions for some time. The Council engages regularly with the institutions in its high-level segment, during the high-level policy dialogue with international finance and trade institutions. Collaboration between the two bodies increased greatly during the preparations for the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey, Mexico, and its follow-up. Since Monterrey, the main focus of the collaboration has been in the context of the financing for

development process, during the Special high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, held in the spring of every year.

55. The recent economic and financial crisis has underlined the importance of strengthening the multilateral system with respect to global economic and financial issues and the critical role of global economic coordination and coherence. In this regard, the Council could explore, with the Bretton Woods institutions, modalities for further enhancing their collaboration in order to achieve better global macroeconomic coordination and coherence as well as implementation of the United Nations development agenda. The working group recently established by the 2012 President of the Council could be used to that end. Such coordination and coherence could also be complemented through engagement between the United Nations and such informal groupings as the Group of 20, thus making the Council a platform for global policy coherence.

C. Reorienting the relations of the Council with its subsidiary machinery

56. Since its establishment, the Council has created a number of subsidiary bodies. These functional and regional commissions and expert bodies report to the Council on their work on an annual basis. They constitute the "technical arm" of the intergovernmental machinery, providing policy options, proposing indicators and carrying out detailed analyses of economic, social and environmental concerns.

57. While strengthening the substantive role of the United Nations, and enhancing engagement with stakeholders and key constituencies, this multiplication of bodies, with their own membership and working methods, has made the institutional landscape more diverse and fragmented. Following an invitation by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/16 to the subsidiary bodies, some have made contributions to the current annual ministerial review, while others have added a specific agenda item on the Council. Some functional commissions have also contributed to the discussions of the Council when the theme was directly related to their work; for example, the Commission on the Status of Women contributed to the annual ministerial review on the theme of gender equality and women's empowerment and the Commission on Social Development contributed to the one on employment.

58. However, there are significant areas for improving coherence. A unified vision and agenda with clearer reporting lines should guide the work of subsidiary bodies, while providing a robust platform for them to enhance their visibility and increase impact in their area of expertise. As proposed in section III above, taking up a main theme each year would increase coherence, while the Council should engage in more substantive dialogue on the reports and recommendations of the functional commissions. Other modalities for interaction between the Commissions and the Council should also be clearly defined to ensure increased interaction and to enhance the impact of their respective work. The periodic meetings between the Bureaux of the Council and its subsidiary bodies should be utilized for that purpose.

V. Reorganizing the way the Council works

59. Consistent with strengthening the Council through increased emphasis on an issues-based approach, Member States may also consider realigning the Council's scheduling and methods of work to better enable it to carry out this focus in a way that integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development. Greater coherence is also needed at the normative, programmatic and operational levels, streamlining the relationship between the Council and its subsidiary bodies, translating normative guidance into more coherent programming, and improving oversight of the United Nations operational activities for development. The Council's institutional mechanisms also need to be strengthened if it is to deliver its increasingly demanding remit in full.

A. The Council and evolving methods of work

60. The Council's current structure and working methods have been shaped through a number of actions taken since 1990. In order to have one session only, the Council merged its two annual regular sessions — one in New York on social issues and one in Geneva on economic issues — into one annual month-long substantive session in July. This session alternates between New York and Geneva and is split into five distinct segments. The Council also holds various other short sessions and events during the year.

61. The 2005 World Summit highlighted and significantly strengthened the role of the Council in driving and monitoring the implementation of the global development agenda, especially in creating the annual ministerial review and the Development Cooperation Forum. This entailed a major reform of the high-level segment, with implications for the work of the Council and its subsidiary bodies throughout the year (see General Assembly resolution 61/16).

62. While strengthening the Council's role vis-à-vis the development agenda, the current organization has also resulted in several challenges, particularly with respect to focus, visibility, timing and engagement. The back-to-back placement of the five segments has tended to dilute the Council's focus during the session and has created competition for engagement and attention by relevant policymakers. As a result, individual segments do not stand out and distinguish themselves sufficiently.

63. The overall length of the substantive session does not facilitate engagement, since most high-level officials are unable to attend a month-long session. It is also not conducive to the participation of high-level officials from the various ministries that deal with the wide range of issues considered in the substantive session. Governments are not inclined to send two or three different officials to the same meeting. It can also be a challenge for many Member States, particularly those with smaller Permanent Missions, to prepare and follow each segment during the four-week period. In addition, the timing of some of the segments is not conducive to better participation.

64. Moreover, maintaining a consistent focus on the follow-up to conferences and summits remains difficult. For instance, the limited period of time devoted to the work of the subsidiary bodies during the general segment has meant that the Council usually confines itself to guidance on process and does not engage sufficiently on the substantive outcomes of the sessions of the commissions. The Council tends to

routinely adopt resolutions submitted to it by the functional commissions and/or takes note of the reports on their sessions. The format of the session reports is determined by this process rather than by the substantive consideration of the policy recommendations contained in the documents and, as a result, guidance to the intergovernmental machinery has been minimal. In addition, connecting the Organization's normative and operational work has been difficult under the current structure.

65. An alternative approach would be to spread the Council's programme into shorter sessions devoted to specific issues. There would not be one high-level segment, but rather several sessions and/or meetings that could attract high-level and multi-stakeholder participation. For example, a session on development cooperation and operational activities would facilitate the engagement of senior government officials and other stakeholders in these areas. Shorter sessions and meetings would not increase the number of days the Council meets: rather, the same four weeks would be spread throughout the year. This would not include meetings convened by the Council to deal with emergency issues, since such meetings would be arranged on an ad hoc basis. If the Council were to address a particular theme during any given year, then the shorter sessions and/or meetings would focus on that theme in different ways. The Council may wish to consider conducting its work in shorter sessions and/or meetings focused on specific issues throughout the calendar year.

66. An overview of the "shorter, focused sessions" format and working methods is set out below, supplemented by the figure following paragraph 74.

Session I: Consideration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and cross-cutting issues

67. During the period from January to May, the subsidiary bodies of the Council and other United Nations system entities would undertake consideration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions and of cross-cutting issues pertaining to the main theme. This would be in line with the work programmes for their own sessions held during that period.[8]

68. Integration of the main theme could also take place, to the extent possible, across the subsidiary bodies of the Council and other United Nations bodies, so as to develop horizontal linkages. Thus, their agendas and work programmes could address the theme in three ways: (a) treating the main theme within their area of competence, clustered around the three dimensions of sustainable development consistent with that theme; (b) addressing the main theme with a view to the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development; and (c) considering how their treatment of the main theme can take into account, interrelate with and impact the work of other bodies.

69. Other United Nations entities addressing the economic and social dimensions of the theme would include the expanded Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the secretariats of the three Rio Conventions and, as relevant, other funds and programmes and specialized agencies. At present, UNEP reports to the General

[8] Some subsidiary bodies may need to adjust their schedules to be able to contribute to the annual session in June.

Assembly through the Council and the secretariats of the Conventions report to the Second Committee. To strengthen coherence on the environmental dimension, it is important that these bodies contribute to Council discussions.

Session II: Development cooperation and operational activities

70. The Council cycle would begin in February in New York with the session on development cooperation and operational activities. The session would include the biennial Development Cooperation Forum and would also address operational activities for development, which are currently considered in the operational activities segment. The session would be held back to back with the meetings of the executive boards of the funds and programmes, which would be of particular benefit to the operational activities function of the session. This session would also host the joint event of the operational activities and humanitarian affairs segments on the transition from relief to development, providing an important link between humanitarian affairs and operational activities for development.

71. The Development Cooperation Forum, in particular, would benefit from the increased visibility it could gain from being in a distinct, focused session, with a view towards increasing engagement with and impact on Governments, bringing about a more meaningful engagement with development partners, and further reinforcing its comparative advantage in attracting and interacting with such non-State actors as private foundations and the private sector. Through the Development Cooperation Forum, the Council has evolved as a hub for reviewing development cooperation and the changing global partnership for development.

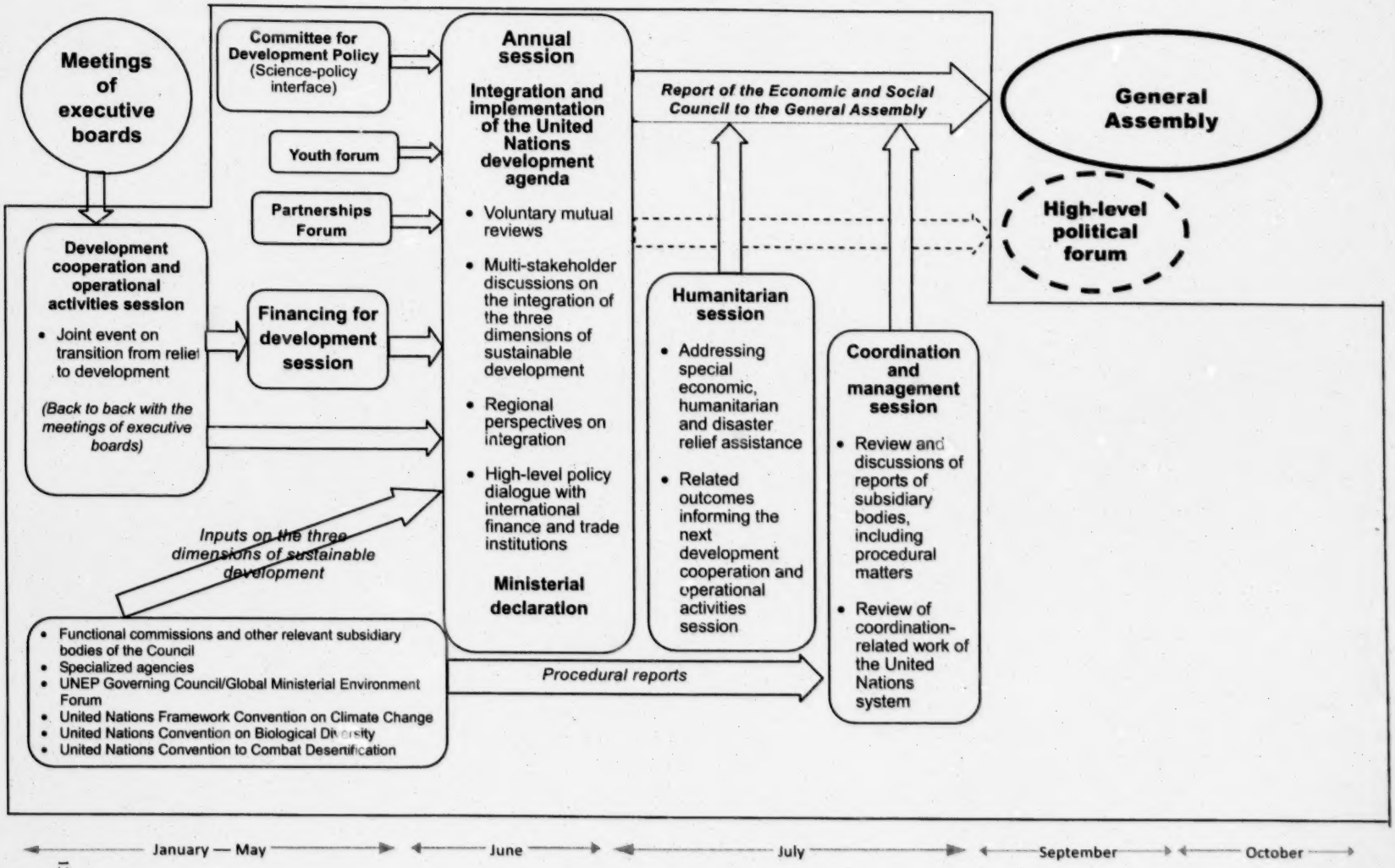
72. The increased visibility could help the Forum to achieve its potential to become the main global forum for dialogue on international development cooperation, thus fulfilling a critical role in the post-2015 development framework.

Session III: Financing for development

73. A session on financing for development would be held in New York in March or April. It would address the follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development and would include the annual spring Special high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. The session would also provide input to the discussions on integration during the annual session in June. A number of proposals for strengthening this process have been presented in the report of the Secretary-General on modalities of the financing for development follow-up process (A/67/353), including ensuring coordination and coherence of the financing for development process with the intergovernmental process on sustainable development financing.

74. The scope of the session could also be adjusted to cover a review of trends in international macroeconomics, trade and finance, as they relate to the Council's main theme. This would allow the Council to be a forum at which collective discussion takes place on the various prognoses from the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Secretariat.

Proposed working methods for the Economic and Social Council


Meetings of executive boards
Committee for Development Policy (Science-policy interface)
Youth forum
Partnerships Forum
Development cooperation and operational activities session
• Joint event on transition from relief to development
(Back to back with the meetings of executive boards)
Financing for development session
Annual session
Integration and implementation of the United Nations development agenda
• Voluntary mutual reviews
• Multi-stakeholder discussions on the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development
• Regional perspectives on integration
• High-level policy dialogue with international finance and trade institutions
Ministerial declaration
Report of the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly
General Assembly
High-level political forum
Humanitarian session
• Addressing special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance
• Related outcomes informing the next development cooperation and operational activities session
Coordination and management session
• Review and discussions of reports of subsidiary bodies, including procedural matters
• Review of coordination-related work of the United Nations system
Inputs on the three dimensions of sustainable development
• Functional commissions and other relevant subsidiary bodies of the Council
• Specialized agencies
• UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum
• United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
• United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
• United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
Procedural reports
January — May
June
July
September
October

Session IV: Annual session of the Council

75. The annual session of the Council would be held in New York in June and would focus on a theme of the United Nations development agenda from an integration and implementation perspective. The session would include the following functions:

(a) *Voluntary mutual reviews*. These would replace the current national voluntary presentations. They would be based on a common platform and a robust analytical framework and would also include formal follow-up;

(b) *Multi-stakeholder discussions on the theme from an integrated perspective*. The objective would be to achieve an integrated discussion of the main theme. The participants would consider, synthesize and integrate the inputs received on the main theme, clustered around the three dimensions of sustainable development, from the Council's preceding sessions and/or meetings that year, plus inputs from the subsidiary bodies of the Council and other United Nations system entities. The discussions would be enhanced by the participation of key partners and stakeholders and of leading experts with state-of-the-art analysis that would brand the Council's thought leadership on the theme;

(c) *Regional perspectives on the theme from an integrated perspective*. The regional commissions provide important forums for articulating regional perspectives on global issues and for contributing to the integration of the three dimensions at the regional level. They would be given the opportunity to share their regional perspectives on the theme by contributing to the integrated discussions and to engage more visibly;

(d) *High-level policy dialogue with international finance and trade institutions*. This would bring the executive heads of these institutions to the Council to hold a discussion with Member States on the current global economic situation.

Session V: Humanitarian affairs

76. A humanitarian session could be held in July to address issues relating to special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. Convening such a stand-alone session in July would further increase the profile of this important annual humanitarian platform. The session could be held in Geneva or New York. Relevant outcomes would inform the next development cooperation and operational activities session the following February.

Session VI: Coordination and management

77. A coordination and management session would also be held in New York in July. In general, the coordination function of the Council should be mainstreamed to the extent possible, ensuring that all sessions promote system-wide coherence. The main purpose, however, would be to address coordination and procedural issues: the session would undertake reviews and discussions of the reports of subsidiary bodies and address the procedural aspects of the oversight function of the Council's subsidiary bodies that are currently addressed during the general segment. In particular, the procedural reports of the functional and regional commissions should be presented for the Council's review at this session.

78. The session would also address some aspects of coordination and review the coordination work of the United Nations system. This could be used to streamline the agenda of the coordination and general segments. The session would also address any other procedural or administrative issues and questions on the Council's agenda. As such, it would not require high-level engagement.

B. Enhancing the coordination role of the Council at the programmatic level

79. In its resolution 45/264, the General Assembly specified that the Council's coordination segment would be entrusted with ensuring coordination of the activities of the specialized agencies, organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in the economic, social and related fields, in accordance with Articles 63 and 64 of the Charter.

80. However, beginning with Council decision 2007/261, the main focus of the coordination segment has been on the programmatic aspects of the theme of the annual ministerial review, namely, how the United Nations system as a whole translates the normative work contained in the previous year's ministerial declaration into specific and coordinated activities. Every year, the Secretary-General is requested to prepare a report on measures taken to implement the ministerial declaration, but the time frame between the adoption of the declaration and the preparation of the report is too short to assess recommendations in a meaningful way. Moreover, reporting on a large number of new activities in addition to what had already been presented in the report submitted to the annual ministerial review of the previous year is challenging.

81. Despite several General Assembly resolutions inviting United Nations system organizations to contribute to the coordination segment,[9] discussions on programmatic issues have not mobilized high-level participation from the system. However, since 2005, there have been improvements in terms of engagement and coordination of the United Nations system around the themes of the annual ministerial review and the Development Cooperation Forum.

82. These improvements have clearly established that coordination should be built around specific issues throughout the work of the Council. The Council could better fulfil its Charter mandate through this approach. At the same time, some issues may be addressed in the coordination and management session if the Council so decides.

83. With a view to promoting coherence among United Nations bodies and encouraging effective inter-agency partnerships, it may be desirable to institute regular interaction between the Bureau of the Council and the chairpersons of the governing bodies of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies, particularly with respect to the main theme of the Council.

[9] See resolutions 45/264, 50/227 and 57/270 B.

C. Improving oversight of United Nations operational activities for development

84. The governance system for the United Nations operational activities for development is constituted by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the executive boards of the funds and programmes and the governing bodies of the specialized agencies, with each having specific roles and responsibilities.

85. This has resulted in a fragmented system, with a general sentiment that, despite its mandate, the Council has not been effective in providing system-wide oversight of a United Nations development system dominated by each entity's executive board or governing body. Council decisions are often viewed as too vague and based on insufficiently integrated analysis in order to provide useful guidance. Many of the Council's functions are also performed in isolation and are not guided by a common vision and strategy.

86. There are several suggestions to address these shortcomings. One is for the Council to establish, as proposed above, a separate, stand-alone session on development cooperation and operational activities, which should serve as a forum to discuss and take decisions on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and other system-wide policies and programming. This session could also serve as the forum for discussions on programmatic coherence at the country level and on common country programmes, as well as for linking the Council's normative and operational work through the integration of sustainable development into operational activities.

87. The agenda of the operational activities segment of the Council could focus primarily on four areas, namely, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, the resident coordinator system, common business practices and inter-agency coordination. These system-wide issues are not addressed at the level of any of the executive boards but are critical for the overall effectiveness and impact of the United Nations development system. The operational activities segment should not review individual United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks in programme countries but rather discuss and approve overall principles and guidelines for this system-wide instrument. The operational activities segment should evolve into a genuine oversight, accountability and policy guidance body that attracts the participation of national policymakers from Member States.

88. The development cooperation and operational activities session could also discuss issues relating to operational interoperability across United Nations entities, such as the implementation of measures to simplify and harmonize business practices, and institute a decision-making process on system-wide interoperability of management issues that fall beyond the purview of individual governing bodies. In this way, the Council could enhance its relevance to the work of the funds and programmes and specialized agencies through increased sensitivity to the dynamics and implications of a United Nations development system based almost exclusively on voluntary funding.

89. The Council may also wish to establish an effective system to monitor the implementation of its decisions, including designing an evidence-based monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with and follow-up to quadrennial comprehensive policy review mandates.

D. Strengthening institutional mechanisms

90. The transformative change occurring in the global economy and in society and the multitude of crises confronting the international community require the Council to step up to its Charter responsibilities to promote the conditions for stability and well-being. One way to do this is to enhance the advocacy role of the Presidency of the Council. Accordingly, the Council could consider making the Presidency a full-time role, with the appropriate human and financial resources to support its functions.

91. At the same time, Secretariat support to the Council should be strengthened to deliver such key reforms as the issues-based functioning of the Council, its position as a thought leader, the preparation of and follow-up to the proposed voluntary mutual reviews, as well as a mechanism to promptly address social, economic and environmental emergencies in an integrated manner. The quality of support to the Council should be augmented by better integrating the rich knowledge and experience of the whole United Nations system into the work of the Secretariat. Increased cooperation between the Secretariat and other United Nations entities would have the positive side effect of increasing intra- and inter-organizational knowledge transfers and thus assist in the overall coherence of United Nations activities for development.

92. The United Nations system should also become more involved in assisting Member States in the preparation and follow-up to the voluntary mutual reviews and should foster the quality of this process.

VI. Conclusions

93. The combination of multiple economic, social and environmental pressures suggests that the world will see continued turbulence in the coming years. The Economic and Social Council can be a bystander or an active intergovernmental body that engages Member States and other stakeholders to deliberate and contribute to an effective and timely multilateral response addressing immediate demands and longer-term development needs.

94. The Council has a potentially pivotal role to play in the United Nations. The upcoming stocktaking of development goals in 2015 requires informed deliberation. The Rio+20 vision of an integrated approach to sustainable development and poverty eradication needs to be elaborated and mainstreamed within the United Nations system. The political commitments renewed at the Rio+20 Conference need to be followed up with increased international cooperation. The implementation of the outcomes of all the relevant United Nations conferences and summits need substantive monitoring at the national, regional and global levels. The Economic and Social Council is at a crossroads: it can handle these tasks procedurally or advance understanding of the issues and promote consensus on appropriate actions.

95. The strengthening of the Council, as discussed in the present report, would require a fundamental reorientation of its focus and methods of work. However, the actions involved build on its existing comparative advantages.

96. The interrelated challenges of sustainable development and poverty eradication are at the heart of the Council's mandate. An issues-oriented Council can help to

leverage the vast reservoir of expertise and experience in the United Nations system to better delineate core issues; cross-cutting dimensions and holistic features; and strategic priorities at all levels. A strengthened Economic and Social Council can also engage stakeholders beyond the United Nations system, through the involvement of the academic and scientific community, the private sector, civil society and public authorities at all levels, in knowledge-sharing and programme partnerships, with a view towards a collective mainstreaming of sustainable development. These challenges demand that the Council and its subsidiary bodies play a more vigorous role in promoting an integrated follow-up to the outcomes of United Nations conferences.